

# The Wagner Society



IN NEW SOUTH WALES INC.

Newsletter No. 107, March 2007

## President's Report

### Dear Members

Welcome to our first Newsletter for 2007. This has ended up being a much more serious President's Letter than normal – there's hardly any naughtiness in this letter – and I hope this isn't a portent for 2007, which can hardly be a serious year with both State and Federal elections!!

### Functions

On Sunday February 18, Terence Watson gave presentations on the Ring Cycle productions last year in Toronto and Costa Mesa, and then led a discussion with other members who had attended these performances, with Maree Leech, Leona Geeves, and Colleen and Michael Chesterman. Terence also gave a talk entitled *The case of Siegfried*, which looked at the journey Wagner created for Siegfried both within the stories of *Siegfried* and *Götterdämmerung*, and within their music. He discussed whether Wagner achieved his aim of developing "a free, true happy man" (and woman) and the challenges that this poses to a director "in an interpretation of Siegfried that is not predicated on ironic distancing or embarrassed belittling, but allows him to reveal his revolutionary potential." Is Dr Watson trying to end the current directorial preference for a Punk Billy Bunter as Siegfried?

This Sunday, March 18, Robert Gay will give a talk on Wagner and French Grand Opera, which will not be another talk on Rienzi, but will discuss the influences of French Grand Opera on the later works, through even to Parsifal.

On Sunday April 15, Nigel Butterley will deliver his second Faust talk, "Faust and the Feminine", and on Sunday May 20 we will have our AGM, our Wagner birthday celebration, and a recital by students from the Conservatorium of

Music, who have received German Language Scholarships from our Society.

### Lecture by Professor Heath Lees

In late August and early September 2007, Professor Heath Lees will tour Australia giving talks to each of the Wagner Societies about his new book "Mallarmé and Wagner: Music and Poetic Language". This is due to be published in June by Ashgate publishers in the UK, and there is already a link to the book on their website at [www.ashgate.com](http://www.ashgate.com).

Professor Lees, originally from Scotland, is Professor of Music at the University of Auckland and his talks, given from the piano with a musicologist's skill, are always highlights. His most recent talk was in Adelaide during the Neidhardt Ring.

Subject to the finalisation of his tour schedule, Professor Lees will be giving a talk on Sunday September 2 entitled "Wagner and Mallarmé: Music as Poetry and Poetry as Music", sub-headed perhaps "Heath Lees opens up the ideas in his new book." Professor Lees has already given talks on this subject in Edinburgh to the Wagner Society of Scotland, and in "broken French" (*Professor Lees' words*) to the Cercle de Wagner de Toulouse. In his talks, Professor Lees argues that "the French understood Wagner's aims and ideas better than any other nation at the time!"

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<b>PATRON:</b>	Sir Charles Mackerras
<b>HONORARY LIFE MEMBERS:</b>	Prof Michael Ewans
	Mr Richard King
	Mr Horst Hoffman
	Mr Joseph Ferfaglia
	Mrs Barbara McNulty OBE

## For Your **Diary**

2007		
<i>Tannhäuser</i>	Opera Australia, Sydney NSW. Revival of Elke Neidhardt's production	8, 11, 16, 20, 23, 27, 30 October & 2 November 2007
<i>Siegfried Idyll</i>	Sydney Symphony Orchestra with Gelmetti and Frank Peter Zimmermann in Berg Violin Concerto and Schubert Great C major symphony	5, 6, 7, 8, December 2007

## Meetings **Dates** & Coming **Events**

DATE	EVENTS - 2007	LOCATION
March 18	1pm Tony Palmer "Wagner" film, 9 of 10 2pm To be confirmed	Goethe Institut
April 15	1pm Tony Palmer "Wagner" film, 10 of 10 2pm Nigel Butterley's second Faust talk. "Faust & the Feminine"	Goethe Institut
May 20	1pm Act 1 of a DVD of Tannhäuser (cast and other details to be confirmed) 2pm AGM 2.30pm recital by students from the Conservatorium of Music 3pm catered birthday celebration for Richard Wagner	Goethe Institut
June	TBC	Goethe Institut
July	NO FUNCTION	
August	NO FUNCTION	
September 2	Professor Heath Lees: Wagner and Mallarme: Music as Poetry and Poetry as Music	Goethe Institut
October	TBC	Goethe Institut
November	TBC	Goethe Institut
December	End of Year Function - please bring a plate	
<b>Goethe-Institut address 90 Ocean Street Woollahra (corner of Jersey Road)</b>		

## Committee **2005 - 2006**

<b>President and Membership Secretary</b>	Roger Cruickshank	9357 7631
<b>Vice President</b>	Julian Block	9337 6978
<b>Treasurer</b>	Michael Moore	9363 2281
<b>Secretary</b>	Mary Haswell	9810 5532
<b>Members</b>	Dennis Mather	9560 1860
	Gabrielle Bremner-Moore	9363 2281
	Alan Whelan	9318 1212
<b>Newsletter Editor</b>	Terence Watson	9517 2786
<b>Public Officer</b>	Alisdair Beck	9358 3922



## President's Report continued

According to Ashgate, Professor Lees "has published widely on the interface between music and words, especially in the works of Beckett and Joyce. His love of all things French is complemented by a passion for the work of Richard Wagner. He is President of the Wagner Society of New Zealand, which he and his wife founded in 1994, now one of the world's larger Wagner Societies. His fascination for the Symbolists came when he read his first Mallarmé poems and felt, he says, as though he were listening to music."

Professor Lees will also bring a contingent of 65 from the New Zealand Wagner Society for the performance of *Tannhäuser* on Saturday October 27, and we hope to organise a function while they are here (although the lure of *The Gondoliers* may prove too great for some.)

### 2006 Bayreuth Scholar

Michal Imielski, the 2006 Bayreuth Scholar, has sent Opera Foundation Australia a very full report on his three months overseas, and the performances which he worked on and attended, and this is reprinted in the Newsletter. We hope that Michal can join us at our May meeting and give a brief talk on his time away, including the work with Barry Kosky on a production of *Tristan und Isolde* that he discusses in his report.

### Membership Renewals

If you haven't already done so, it's time to renew your membership for 2007, and a renewal form is provided on the inside back cover of this issue, and on our website at <http://www.wagner-nsw.org.au/membership.html>. This form includes our bank account details, so if you'd prefer to transfer your money direct into the Society's bank account using your bank's internet banking facilities, you can.

One unexpected benefit of membership renewal this year is that I've learned a little more about my new country, Australia. I've discovered Kenilworth in Queensland, which has a postcode of 4574, which is the same as our GPO Box number here in Sydney. A number of our renewal letters come with a Kenilworth stamp emblazoned on their reverse, which means that the letter has journeyed through time-zone changes all the way to Kenilworth and back. If, like me, you have never heard of Kenilworth, there is a website at <http://www.kenilworthguide.org.au/> which can put your mind at rest. It's inland from Noosa and Maroochydore.

### Wagner performances here and overseas

Sydney's two Wagner events in 2007 will be the Australian Opera's performances of *Tannhäuser* in October and early November, and the Sydney Symphony Orchestra's performances of the *Siegfried Idyll* in December.

As well as leading a tour to the Bangkok Opera's *Die Walküre* in July, Peter Bassett is also taking a tour titled 'In the Footsteps of Richard Wagner' to Europe in

June. Destinations include Paris, Lucerne, Zurich, Munich, three of King Ludwig's castles, Bayreuth, Dresden, Berlin and Hamburg, and the group will attend performances, including *Lohengrin*, *The Flying Dutchman* and *Tristan und Isolde*. A number of our members have already booked for this tour, which proved to be very popular and was quickly full. Peter Bassett has let us know that a number of places have become vacant in the last week or so, and these are being offered on a first-come first-served basis. If you're interested, contact Renaissance Tours on 1300 727 095, toll free, for further information.

### Bruce Martin to record Wagner CD

Universal Music Australia has embarked on a project to record famous Australian opera singers in Australia with Australian orchestras, which they hope to distribute in Australia and Europe. In the first recording in this project, Universal is producing a CD with Bruce Martin, which will be the first time that Mr Martin has been recorded in his professional opera career. The recording will be produced in Perth in mid July with the West Australian Symphony Orchestra with Simone Young conducting. Ms Young is returning to Australia specifically for this project.

Universal is looking for financial contributions to enable this recording to take place, and is hoping to raise \$30,000 from private donations and from Wagner Society members throughout Australia as part of its overall budget of around \$200,000.

If you are interested in helping with this project, you can contact Elisabeth Turner, the Classical Artist and Repertoire Consultant to Universal Music Australia, by phone on (03) 9596 9909 (mobile 0407 328 066) or by email [lizelst@bigpond.net.au](mailto:lizelst@bigpond.net.au). There is a package of benefits for private sponsorships of more than \$1,000, including having your name in the accompanying CD booklet and a free set of Ring CDs. You can also make a donation to the Society and ask that it be passed on to Universal Music, which will not attract any benefits but will be tax deductible.

While the track list has not been finalised, the tracks being considered include:

*Die Walküre* - Ride of the Valkyries and "Leb' wohl" (Wotan's Farewell) and Magic Fire Music

*Der fliegende Holländer* - Prelude and "Die Frist ist um"

*Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* - Prelude to Act 3, "Wahn! Wahn! Überall Wahn!" (Wahnmonolog) and "Was duftet doch der Flieder" (Fliedermonolog)

*Tristan und Isolde* - Prelude to Act 1 and King Marke's monologue

*Götterdämmerung* - Hagen's Watch and Siegfried's Funeral March

*Tannhäuser* - "O, du mein holder Abendstern"

### Wagner Journal

This month (March 2007) has seen the launch of a new Wagner Journal in the UK, edited by Barry Millington.



## President's Report continued

While the launch of a Wagner journal usually doesn't cause much comment on the platform, this first issue contained a translation of a previously unpublished letter by Richard Wagner to a firm of Milanese couturiers which hinted that Herr Wagner might have been a cross-dresser. This salacious possibility gave the Journal's launch all the publicity it required.

On 2 March, both the Sydney Morning Herald and The Age carried on-line the same story by Charlotte Higgins from The Guardian in London. The SMH headlined her report "Wagner's secret passion for frock opera", while The Age punned "Curtain lifts on Wagner's secret pink rhapsody." Even Sydney's free evening MX paper carried a short report under the headline "Letter skirts dress code." It seems that Mr Millington and all the sub-editors involved enjoyed the punning opportunities this story gave rise to.

The Wagner Journal will appear three times a year in March, July and November, and will be published both in print form for 52 pounds a year (approx A\$130) and online for 30 pounds (approx A\$75). A subscription for both the print and online forms of the Journal will be 57 pounds (approx A\$145). Full details of subscriptions etc are available at the journal's website, <http://www.thewagnerjournal.co.uk/>.

### Bayreuth 2007

We've now received a total of ten sets of tickets for Bayreuth 2007, and the lucky members who will be going are Colin Jones and Paul Curran, June Donsworth, Julie and Terry Clarke, Monica and Aliro Olave, Pauline Holgerson and MaryAnne and Nick Gillott.

Under our current balloting system for tickets, the member whose name is drawn first from the hat has first choice of seats for each opera and for the Ring; the member whose name is drawn second has the choice of any of the remaining seats; and so on until the last name is drawn, and that member has no choice at all – they get whatever is left. This means that the lucky first usually has the best seats for every performance, and the unlucky last the worst (if any seat at Bayreuth can be called "bad") and everyone has the same companions sitting with them for every performance.

It has been suggested that the Society should allocate tickets so that members have a mixture of seats within the Festspielhaus (except for the *Ring*, where only one ticket is issued for the four nights) and so that members can sit with different people for each of the non-Ring works, and we'll put this to the AGM in May.

It's not the same without a little naughtiness, is it? I look forward to seeing many of you at one of our functions in 2007.

Warmest regards

**Roger Cruickshank**  
12 March 2007

## New Members

The following people joined the Society:

Peter Murray and Andrew Laughlin (958)

## Donations

The Society welcomes all donations and they can be addressed to the Treasurer, Wagner Society in NSW Inc, at the Society's GPO Box address shown on the back page of this Newsletter. Such donations help us to carry out our objective "to promote the music of Richard Wagner and to encourage a wider appreciation of the significance of his achievements". Donations are tax-deductible and receipts will be issued. Donations were gratefully received from the following members and supporters: Douglas Barry; Bill Brooks and Alasdair Beck; Ingrid Garofali; Kenneth Reed; Mitzi Saunders; Richard C Mason; Barbara and Nicholas Dorsch; Despina Kallinikos; Diana-Rose Orr; Nizza Siano; Monica and Aliro Olave; Jennifer Ferns; Patricia and Roy Hodson; Jane Mathews; Pam and Ian McGaw; Neville Mercer; Barbara and Ian Brady; Heather and Peter Roland; Anna-Lisa Klettenberg; Mary Haswell; Ivan Shearer; Heinz Ebert; Annie Marshall; Neville Pollard; Margaret Hennessy; Vanessa King; Ann Weeden; Hugh Hallard; Nubent Pty Limited; and Walter Norris.

## News From The Green Hill

The 96th Bayreuth Festival begins on 25 July 2007 with *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* in a new production directed by 28-year-old Katharina Wagner and marks her debut in the Festspielhaus. The performance will be conducted by Sebastian Weigle, also making his debut in Bayreuth. Perhaps her success, or otherwise, will be a factor in whether or not she succeeds her father, Wolfgang, as director of the Festival. Her previous Wagner opera productions include *Der fliegende Holländer* in Würzburg in 2002 and *Lohengrin* in Budapest in 2003 as well as productions of Albert Lortzing's *Der Waffenschmied* (The Gunsmith) in Munich in 2005 and Puccini's *Il Trittico* in Berlin in 2006. Frau Wagner's partner, Endrik Wottrich, will return as Siegmund in the first revival of Tankred Dorst's Ring Cycle production. The Schlingensiefel production of *Parsifal* will appear for its last time with the Hungarian conductor, Adam Fischer.





# 107 Membership List as at 31 December 2006

Paul Alger (255); Jessie Anderson (110); Carl Andrew (772); Philip Bacon (890); Sybil Baer (418); Carole Bailey (663); Patricia Baillie (108); Norma Barne (926); Glen Barnwell (944); Douglas Barry (942); Armand Bartos (860); Colin Baskerville (817); Peter Bassett (826); Janette Bates (785); Marlene Baumgartner (393); Margareta Baxter (775); Sandra Beesley (759); Patricia Bellamy and Carolyn Bloch (827); Phillip Bennett (925); Rosemary and Julian Block (745); Tony Bonin (910); Jan Bowen (743); Barbara and Ian Brady (380); Gabriella Bremner-Moore and Michael Moore (819); Bill Brooks and Alasdair Beck (765); David Brown (919); Susan and James Buchanan (423); Richard Buckdale and Murray Johnstone (777); Margaret Budge (275); Frances Butcher (918); Richard Button (931); Margot Buttrose (896); Stephen Carroll (867); Julie Carroll (928); John Casey (114); Maurice Cashmere (877); Ann Casimir (501); Alexander Cater and Rosemary Cater-Smith (638); Humphrey Charles and Pauline Alexander (951); Terry and Greg Chesher (685); Colleen and Michael Chesterman (901); Julie and Terry Clarke (496); Christopher Coffey (816); Aviva and Alec Cohen (355); Adrian Collette (734); Daryl Colquhoun (732); Susan Condon (804); Jennifer Condon (805); Joan and Maxwell Connery (334); Susan Conrade (905); Rae and Russ Cottle (843); Alexander Cozzolino (930); Moya Crane (545); Roger Cruickshank (669); Peter Cumines (927); Elizabeth and Barry Dale (953); Catherine Davies (921); Michael Day and Philip Cornwell (606); Barbara de Rome (207); Lorenza dei Medici (900); David Delany and Alister Wong (766); Charlotte and Hartmut Derichs (661); Ian Dicker (897); Susette and Martin Dickson (924); Clyde Dominish (807); Harry Donaldson (117); Brian Donovan (645); June Donsworth (884); Barbara and Nicholas Dorsch (154); Barbara and Andrew Dowe (870); Brian Ducker (487); Sandy and Phil Dudgeon (788); Heinz Ebert (378); Phillip Emanuel (947); Clive Evatt (624); Michael Ewans (Honorary Life Member) William Felbel (893); Igor Ferdman (949); Judy Ferfaglia and Joseph Ferfaglia (Honorary Life Member) (45); Jennifer Ferns (34); Michele and Onofrio Ferrara (706); Mary and Graeme Fogelberg (880); Bob Foster (850); Edith and Hans Freeman (907); Brian Freestone and Charles Brady (840); Stephen Freiberg and Donald Campbell (585); Vic and Katie French (945); David and Sabina Full (883); Warwick Fyfe (755); Ingrid Garofali (778); Paola Garofali (914); Richard Gastineau-Hills (68); Leona Geeves (87); Diana and Peter George (873); William Gillespie OAM (776); Sue Gillies (514); MaryAnne and Nick Gillott (955); Elizabeth Gordon-Werner (878); Andrew Goy (723); Robert Graham (904); Helen and Kevin Grant (681); Nance Grant (120); Dennis Gray (938); Tim Green (933); John Gregory-Roberts (748); Paul Gresham (932); Joan Griffin (540); Maxwell Grubb (858); Peter Hall (727); Hugh Hallard (799); Wendy and Andrew Hamlin (593); Derek Harrison and Marcus Susanto (939); Siss Hartnett and Britt Hartnett (667); Pat and Frank Harvey (427); Mary Haswell (857); Simon Hatcher (333); Alan Hauserman and Janet Nash (876); Melinda Hayton (757); Clare Hennessy (19.1); Margaret Hennessy (19.2); Marie Hiscock (249); Patricia and Roy Hodson (894); Horst Hoffmann (Honorary Life Member) Pauline Holgerson (863); Glenn Horne (948); Theo Hudson (489); Cynthia Hughes (189); Lydia and Irvine Hunter (744); Ian Hutchison (783); Esteban Insausti (433); Elizabeth Jacka (898); Cherry Jackaman (441); Judith Jacks (637); Douglas Jamieson (90); Esther Janssen (760); Peter Jenkins (862); Brett Johnson (779); Colin Jones and Paul Curran (749); Gillian and Brian Jones (751); Anne Jones (861); Erika Jumikis (768); Renate and Herman Junker (866); Naomi Kaldor (796); Despina Kallinikos (596.1); Iphygenia Kallinikos (596.2); Angela Kayser (845); Joe Kelleher (913); Susan Kelly (4); Richard King (15); Vanessa King (306); Julie King and D Woodley-Page (7); Anna-Lisa Klettenberg (847); Sylvia and Karl Koller (52); Ira Kowalski (536); Marie Leech (916); Paul Lehmann (471); Carole and Jim Leigh (452); Britta and Harry Littman (610); Robert Lloyd (795); Lynette Longfoot (922); Bruce Love (468); Charles MacKerras (Patron) Colin MacKerras (859); Erin Flaherty and David Maloney (952); Charles Manning (940); Jennifer Manton (718); Libby Manuel (950); Annie Marshall (403); Camron Dyer (544); Dennis Mather and John Studdert (696); Jane Mathews (622); Diana McBain (419); David McCarthy (648); Tony McDonald (420); Gillian and Kenneth (Tim) McDonald (935); Pam and Ian McGaw (548); John McGrath (310); Robert McHugh (911); Barbara McNulty OBE (Honorary Life Member) (601); Mary Meppem (912); Neville Mercer (737); Irene and Wolfgang Merretz (115); Judi Mitchell (613); Patricia Moore (515); Elsie and James Moore (811); Elizabeth Moser (659); Judith Mulveney (599); Peter Murray and Andrew Laughlin (958); David Mutton (437); Helen and Bill Naylor (643); Barbara and Peter Nicholson (704); Margery and Geoffrey Nicoll (672); Walter Norris (204); Monica and Aliro Olave (735); Diana-Rose Orr (844); Audrey and John Palmer (882); Colin Piper (222); Neville Pollard (856); Marian and Rodney Purvis (874); Elle and Kate Rasink (806); Kenneth Reed (41); Garry Richards (366); Juliet Richters and Alan Whelan (899); Shirley Robertson (416); Heather and Peter Roland (855); Amanda and George Rosenberg (943); Lorraine Royds (823); Mitzi Saunders (683); Cecilia Segura (758); Penelope Seidler (781); Ruth Shane (920); Ivan Shearer (954); Sam Sheffer (101); Sir Nicholas and Lady Shehadie (798); Nizza Siano (619); John Small (915); Jeffrey Smart and Ermes de Zan (865); Michael Smyth (903); John Snelling (879); Robert Spillane (917); Hannah and Willi Spiller (671); Lourdes St George (895); Ross Steele (838); Richard Steele (327); Vince Stefano (936); Meredith Stokes (885); Richard Stone and John Thomson (615); Douglas Sturkey (902); Margaret and Bill Suthers (14); Susan and John Sutton (647); Annemarie Swebbs (476); Charles Terrasson (439); Pamela and Graham Thomas (957); Peter Thompson (746); Robert Thurling (830); Isolde Torna (800); David Triggs (223); Paddy Trumbull (941); Susan Upton (871); John Vallentine (854); Warren and Susan Walsh (956); Jane and Barry Walters (655); Terence Watson (657); Greg Watters (892); Janet and Hugh Wayland (10); Ann Weeden (561); Ross Whitelaw (527); Margaret Whitlam (325); Deanne Whittleston and Anthony Gregg (839); Suzanne Williams (929); Gary Wilson (834); Alfredo Zaniboni (946); Sharon Zelei (937); and Anna Ziegler (443).



# Report of Michal Imielski, The 2006 Bayreuth Scholar

*This is a copy of the Report which Michal Imielski, the 2006 Bayreuth Scholar, sent to Opera Foundation Australia following the completion of his three-month visit to Europe last year. Our Society provided Michal with the return airfare from Sydney.*

I would like to thank you once more for awarding me the Bayreuth Scholarship. It was an amazing experience, a perfect introduction to German art, to new artists from all over the world and to Germany itself.

My stay in Europe followed closely the original proposed study plan. My Europe trip started on the 10/09/2006 and finished 13/12/2006 – two and a half months I have spent in Germany; the other two weeks I spent in Poland, France, China and Thailand.

From 24 September to 23 October, I have held the position of a Hospitant at the Komische Oper in Berlin. I have assisted there an opera written in 2002 by Pierangelo Valtinoni conducted by Anna-Sophie Brüning and directed by Jetske Mijnsen – *Pinocchio*. The opera was of a special kind since it was for a kid's audience. It also had an enormous number of kids cast in it, both as main characters as well as two large choirs. It was a very interesting working environment where very different methods of control direction and invention were applied. Also having such a huge cast with such tight choreography, new notation methods had to be invented in order to mark out such ideas as 'Claudia is the 26th fish in the back row, and must hold her foot up on every second beat'. Besides dealing with such a huge varied group of artists, another interesting aspect was how Komische Oper operated; their combined projects with Deutsches Oper and Staats Oper, their policies both internal and dictated by the union as well as working ethics.

Berlin is an amazing city. The amount of art being produced there every week is enormous. *Pinocchio* had unusual working times for Germany; 10am to 6pm. This meant that I was able to watch one to three performances every single day, and I still was not able to observe everything. One of the most interesting opera beginnings I witnessed was in Staats Oper – *Dido and Aeneas* directed and choreographed by Sasha Waltz. A giant fish tank was present on stage. When the lights dimmed, the dancers jumped into the water, and swam / danced to the baroque music. Beside the opera productions, which I primarily witnessed in Staats Oper, Komische Oper and Deutsches Oper, such theatre houses as Volksbühne, Schaubühne and Hebbel Theatre were an amazing experience since all three are trying very hard to redefine what is opera, what is dance, theatre, what is life and what is film. They simply

treated theatre and music theatre as an art work that stands on its own, that it there to change an individual and not just present new convenient interpretation of the canon. They have created works which cannot be recognised as any of these genres since they had a little bit of each. In the Volksbühne for example Meistersinger directed by Frank Castorf was a terrifying new experience in the opera, very different from such clichés as singers masturbating on stage or mutilating little girls as present in some more celebrated opera production in Berlin, but a world created from punk culture, singer screaming and not singing the opera, cars being driven, monkeys interrupting the choir; an internal deconstruction based on creation and recreation of energy. Amazing new ideas that every Berlin audience was struggling with.

From 23 of October till the 9th of December I have held positions of Hospitant (2nd assistant director) in the Aalto Theatre in Essen under the direction of Barrie Kosky and conductor Stefan Soltesz. I stayed with this production (*Tristan und Isolde*) from the beginning till the end, which allowed me into Barrie Kosky's head; his politics of creation; his problem solving and his working ethic. It was amazing to see Barrie dealing with one of the hardest opera's ever written. Stefan Soltesz was also extremely interesting to watch. Both men were fighting hard to reinvent the opera, Soltesz putting his musicians, both behind, above, below the main orchestra, separating his musicians into what could be regarded as four dimensional sound, with soloist hidden with the performers or above them. Barry directs with other people's ideas. The love scene for example had a spinning room, as a metaphor of Tristan and Isolde's love. The singers had to improvise a great deal in this unstable environment to find beautiful representations of Barrie's systematic movement compositions, without disruption of the diaphragm, so that the duet could be sung without problems. His interpretation of the entire opera has been very inspirational. Most beautiful was the ending to the opera where the world of the dead and living has joined together in a new space, and so Isolde and Tristan were reunited.

I also managed to get in to observe one of the rehearsals for *Germania* at Deutsche Oper. This proved to be very interesting purely because of the international cast, which could not communicate clearly in a single language. Italians did not speak English, Americans spoke little German, French knew only French. And the assistant director was directing the entire opera in four Languages.

I have seen 44 performances in Berlin. There was no evening where I didn't see a performance. I saw everything from opera, musicals, theatre, visual theatre, dance, technology performance art, happenings, disabled groups as well as modern puppet experiments. In Essen it was much harder to see shows, since the rehearsal times were 10am till 2pm and then 6pm till 9pm, which made it impossible to watch anything at night. Therefore I could only watch approximately 2 performances a week on weekends: symphonies, ballet, modern dance and opera were of very high standard.



During my stay in Essen I have travelled back to Berlin since the Schaubuhne theatre held an international visual theatre festival. All of the young experimental visual and sonic artists were invited from all over the world to perform there. It was amazing to see what amount of support is given to young artists in Europe and what superb work they produce – very inspiring. In the Volksbuhne at the same time I have witnessed *The Cryonic Chants* created by Scott Gibbons and Chiara Guidi (Societas Raffaello Sanzio) as part of the Italian festival. This was a modern opera combined with film art and performance art, where music was composed from a pattern discovered in an impassive animal, a goat, and combined with modern electronic music.

Beside Germany I visited my home country Poland where I met up with [Leszeck] Madzik, the director of Scena Plastyczna Kul, pioneer of theatre without actors, as well as Laco Adamik, a very important opera director in Poland. I was also invited to Paris by the Philippe Genty Compagnie, where I have watched from the backstage the workings of *Zygmund Follies*, which proved to be a lot more interesting than from the front; the workings of two magician/puppeteers; two entities working as

one. In Paris I also met my favourite director [Romeo] Castellucci, who was there with his new production *Hey Girl!* I consider Castellucci's work to be new or modern operas. There is little singing involved although the music and the visual material are so precisely composed together that it is frightening. This man has created a unique language of music theatre that simply is food for the soul. Once someone asked me what is the difference between a brilliant work and an ok work of theatre or opera. Once could answer simply: one changes your life, but I answered looking at the more practical elements, the difference is that with one you think during the production with the other you think about the production long after it is finished. I am still thinking about his.

I have learnt a great deal about the directing techniques, politics and where opera and theatre is going in the world. I have met people that have become my working colleagues and my best of friends. The unfortunate lesson that I have learnt is how far behind the opera world in Australia really is, and how it must begin to examine itself for the young generation of audiences or it will not regain its strength.

## From the Cartoon to the Abstract - Tristan Und Isolde In San Francisco and Perth

You may remember my review of three Tristans in 2005, in which I was able to experience Lisa Gasteen and John Treleaven in Brisbane, Nina Stimme and Robert Dean Jones at Bayreuth and then Christine Brewer and Christian Franz in a concert performance in Edinburgh. This time, I was able to hear Brewer in common, so to speak, but also to have interesting overlaps with the Toronto Ring Cycle in which Christian Franz sang Siegfried. Also Susan Bulloch, the Toronto Brünnhilde, was the Perth Isolde.

### The cartoon - San Francisco

Remember Disney's film of *Snow White and Sleeping Beauty*? Well, the overall design and costuming has appeared on stage for San Francisco's revival of the LA Opera Company's Tristan compliments of David Hockney. The sets and costumes are not quite as detailed as the ones Disney's artists created for those animated pictures, but the look is much the same. Hockney has simplified the elements into broad cartoons - a few strong colours, stylised ship, trees and castle rampart/crag for each of the sets. In fact, Hockney has stylised and unified even more by using the same triangular look for the sets for each of the three acts: the point of the triangle elevated stage rear. For Act one, it is the prow of a ship, with Isolde's apartment front stage, but the apartment consists of a "cardboard" cut-out

wall-hanging stage right in front of which sits a large chest and a modernist couch (supporting the sleeping Isolde as the act opens). The sails are again "cardboard" cut-outs of half moons. There are a number of a masts (suggesting a very unbalanced ship - which may be appropriate, given its cargo), some of which obscure my view of the trapdoor out of which Tristan, Kurnewal et al appear - magically from my perspective. Isolde is a large lady (Christine Brewer looks taller than Rita Hunter was, but of similar girth) and dressed in Disney mediaeval - red with purple lining. Brangane (Jane Irwin) is in that mediaeval green made famous by the Pre-Raphaelites, also with purple lining. Tristan (Thomas Moser) is in a dark blue costume that recalls the wicked King in Shrek!! Kurnewal (Boaz Daniel) could have been dressed by the same Shrek designer. The sailors/steerman etc were also possibly dressed from the Shrek wardrobe. You get the picture! Fortunately, the drastic simplification of the set and the colour scheme saved it to some extent from the saccharine quality often present in Disney cartoons.

The set for Act two is a tree-lined path receding (to the point of the triangle) into the distance stage rear along a rampart of the castle - the castle steps are evident extreme stage right front. One of the trees has been cut down, apparently to provide a spot for Brewer to sit and rest - more of this anon.

The set for Act three is a simple rampart/crag of Tristan's castle - also receding to a point stage rear. It has a few boulders and some dry looking grass. All three sets create the sense of the point of the triangle being very high. For example, with the steep sides of the crags visible in Tristan's castle scene suggesting a sheer plunge into the sea. However, about the only entrance point for the sets for Acts two and three is a small stairway situated about halfway down the set up which the performers have to





scramble at some point. This is particularly embarrassing for Brewer who has to make her Act three entrance up this staircase, rather constraining her passionate, headlong rush to her dying beloved's side. King Marke, with full imperial costume flowing also has to make a very ungainly entrance up this staircase. Doesn't anyone ever override a stupid director's silly ideas? Who cares if it's David Hockney! If his sets clearly don't work technically or dramatically, someone should have told him.

But now for the singing/interpretation/acting. For me, singing and acting honours go to Moser whom I had previously heard with Deborah Voight in 2004 in the Vienna Staatsoper production of *Tristan*. I find his voice easy to listen to and secure and warm throughout his register, although Brewer's top notes overpowered him - who wouldn't be! He lasted until almost the last bars, when his voice lost power, but not tone. Kurnewal thoughtfully provided him with little flask of something nourishing and vivifying early on in Act three and Tristan kept swigging away on it. However, whatever nectar or balsam was in it, it wasn't a miracle voice-saver. Still, he gave a wonderful impression of being besotted by Brewer's Isolde, manfully trying to embrace her on many occasions, but defeated by her bulk.

Brewer's voice impressed me a little more than in Edinburgh. According to an article in the program, she has only been singing Isolde for five years, so there is some settling in to do. In fact, in the program, Brewer quotes a letter sent to her by Birgit Nilsson: "Birgit Nilsson heard the recording [on Warner Classics] and sent Brewer a 'lovely letter, which started out "Frau Isolde!!!" urging Brewer to sing the role as much as possible, "in order to integrate it more deeply into body and soul"'. She may grow into it, but she may also grow herself out of roles altogether. Without wanting to subscribe uncritically to the modern trend for lithe and sleek sopranos at whatever price, who may or may not have a voice to match, I do think it is a problem when the soprano seems unable to walk around the stage for more than a few minutes before having to sit. It begs questions about vocal stamina, that seemed, in this case, to be justified as Brewer's voice regularly disappeared when she sank from her shattering top notes into her lower middle register. It also must make it difficult for any hero/tenor and director to work with someone who is constantly sitting down for a rest.

The director (Thor Steingraber – who worked on Chicago's Ring Cycle) had a nice idea for what happens after Tristan and Isolde drink the love potion in Act one. They stare into space and, apparently unconsciously or intuitively, mirror each other's arm gestures as they first clasp their hearts, then open their arms until they are reaching into space and then cross their arms over chest (as if hugging themselves) and then, finally take each other by the hand. It is only then that they turn to each other and, in a move I do not remember seeing in any other production, actually kiss.

I was, however, relieved that, for most of the love duet that makes up most of Act two, Brewer managed to

deliver a silky tone that matched Moser's warmth. She may have been helped by the fact that they spent most of the time sitting on the tree stump! Irwin's Brangane brought welcome steadiness and richness both in her initial scene with Isolde in the garden, but also when she floated her "Beware!" over the heads of the lovers. Because she was in a casement window of the castle whose wall formed the wall on stage left, I couldn't see her, but could see the shadow of her head that the lighting designer had thoughtfully arranged to fall in the middle off the stage, over the lovers. During this moment, the lovers took the opportunity to scuttle off into the trees - not sure if it was to take a leak, have a refreshing beverage, or to consummate their passion, but they didn't return in time for Tristan to invite Isolde to "Sink down". I think Moser's voice at this point was at its most ravishing - seductive and rich.

During the duet, Tristan and Isolde repeat some of the mime from Act one denoting, I take it, that they are now either operating in the same spiritual/ metaphysical realm or that their spirits/souls have merged - maybe that is the same thing anyway. I found it very an effective way of translating an internal state into a stage gesture. I think Wagner would have approved. However, the impact would have been more powerful if the soprano's arm movements were actually fluid and freer than Brewer was able make them. Olga Sergejeva (the Brunnhilde from the Kirov Ring Cycle), for example - now there's a singer I'd sell my body to hear as Isolde!

King Marke has to arrive up the back stairs, making it a rather anticlimactic moment as Melot had already arrived up the stairs, followed by Kurnewal and a number of knights. It would have been more convincing, as it in most other productions I've seen, for King Marke to pop out from somewhere with maximum surprise/shock. At least Isolde and Tristan were still locked in a kiss - the obliviousness that comes with a good push! Marke (Kristinn Sigmundson!!) was well worth waiting for - he has a powerful, rich dark voice with considerable agility and made the most of his despair and regret over Tristan's betrayal of him. He never once looked at Isolde, but had a number of close physical encounters with Tristan as he embraced him and even shook him at one point. I was lucky enough to register major goosebumps when Tristan invites Isolde to follow him to the land of night - one of my favourite sections of the work. (Domingo does a great job, too, in his latest recording with Nine Stimme.)

Moser's voice was beginning to wear shortly into Act three, but fortuitously and fortunately, Tristan is also starting to fall to pieces - or to fall into another world - so his vocal condition could be taken as a reflection of his changing metaphysical condition. However, it is nice to have a tenor, like Robert Dean Jones in Bayreuth last year, who can hold the power and accuracy to the last notes. I almost had to look away when Brewer arrived up yet another set of back stairs - this time we are to suppose that they lead up from the beach on which Isolde has landed to the castle rampart on which Tristan is rapidly expiring. Brewer's last few wobbly steps onto





the rampart showed that she was just managing to make it to the top. Fortunately for Brewer, Wagner gave Isolde a few moments of near faint after she sees Tristan die in front of her. So, once King Marke and his knights have despatched most everyone - and Melot has received his just deserts, Brewer has had a chance to recover her breathing. She then launched into a powerful and quite moving version of the *Erklärung* (*Liebestod*). Just when she is about to expire herself, Tristan (or his spirit) arrives and walks behind Isolde and they go through some of that mime from Acts one and two - a nice directorial touch that brought the opera to a quite moving end.

Runnicles, the conductor, claims in the program to have a special regard for Wagner's operas and I think it shows as he drew loving lines from the players for the love music, chilling brass for the poison and betrayal etc and an overall warmth and richness. I still think that the orchestral playing by the Bamberg Symphony in Edinburgh is one of the best I've heard live - as well, of course the Bayreuth orchestra!

### The old familiar abstract – Perth

The West Australian Opera Company should be very pleased with its decision to stage *Tristan und Isolde* as its first fully staged Wagner opera. It has done a concert version of *Tannhäuser* in the 1990s that I, unfortunately, missed. The WASO also performed a concert version of *Götterdämmerung* in 2003 for the 50th anniversary of Perth's annual arts Festival - also with Susan Bullock and Allan Woodrow.

However, it must have been gratifying to be able to post those "Sold Out" signs relatively early in the booking period. It must also have been pleasing to see the positive response to the opening night on Saturday, 4 November, especially to Susan Bullock and Bernadette Cullen (as Brangäne). According to a report in *The West Australian* (4 November 2006, p.13), it cost the Opera Company about \$1M dollars compared with the average costs of \$700,000 for one of their productions.

It was a sensible decision to take the 1990 Neil Armfield production from Opera Australia to avoid the costs of mounting a new production and concentrate some those savings on bringing in major singers. I liked the atmospheric, timeless, placeless Armfield production from its premiere, especially its use of lighting on the simple "walls" of white parachute silk, and the evocative colours and ripples reflecting back from the sheet of water under the transparent aeroplane wing suspended above the water. It was also good to see again the transparent casket - it is much more evocatively otherworldly than, for example, the clumsy sea-chest used in the recent San Francisco production.

It seemed to my slightly hazy memory of the production in Sydney that there has been a little more activity added, with sailors and soldiers at stage rear, but it was probably there in the original. I do remember that the fight in Act III between King Marke's soldiers and Tristan's retainers was unnecessarily busy in the initial production and was trimmed in the revival. In Perth, the

soldiers also remain standing in the water on the stage while Melot and Kurnewal are despatched - keeping the focus on the main players.

It was clearly a gala night for Perth with the Vice-regal party arriving to the national song. The audience was generally well-behaved with less coughing and rustling and talking than is usual in Sydney (or some other venues I've been in recently). There were quite a few Sydney-siders as well as Perth and Adelaide and New Zealand people I had met at the Adelaide Ring or at other Wagner performances. More turned up for the other performances on Wednesday and the following Saturday, thus proving again that Wagnerians will travel anywhere for a performance, if they can afford it. As *The West Australian* put it: "Recalling Tristan and Isolde's opening lines, 'Westward drifts my gaze', [WA Opera's General Manager, Craig] Whitehead estimates that about 200 people have flown to Perth from around Australia, Europe, Asia and New Zealand".

I sat next to a younger local Wagner Society member who was seeing his first fully staged Wagner, after seeing both the *Tannhäuser* and the *Götterdämmerung* here, as well as making the pilgrimage to Adelaide for the Neidhardt Ring. He was in "raptures" at the end of this Tristan, but was heading south to take his non-Wagnerian wife and family on holiday, but he will be back for the final performance. Not many other younger people were present on opening night. That may only have been because so many of the tickets would have been house/corporate tickets. More younger locals made it to the next two performances. I know that one spare ticket I had to dispose of was heading to a student, so I hope the student enjoyed it and develops a lifelong love for Wagner's operas.

It is worthwhile noting that the WA Wagner Society celebrates its 20th anniversary this year, so it is a doubly significant event for Perth and for them. So, hearty congratulations to Perth for its commitment to Wagner's works and many thanks for giving Australian and New Zealand Wagnerians our annual fix, if we were not able to travel overseas to get one.

The scheduled conductor, Richard Mills, sadly, had a heart attack about two weeks before opening night. This was a disappointment for me as I had hoped to see how Mills had developed as a Wagnerian conductor after his debut with the Australian Youth Orchestra in Brisbane in 2005, with Lisa Gasteen and John Treleaven. However, the WA Opera Company was able to bring in Lionel Friend who had conducted the 2003 Perth concert performance of *Götterdämmerung*. It turns out that Susan Bullock and Friend have worked together for many years. Bullock says of her relationship with Friend as conductor: "It's not a case of him beating a stick and me following. It's like we're joined by an invisible piece of elastic across the pit" (interview in *The Sunday Times*, 5 November 2006, p49). This close relationship was evident in the ease with which Bullock moved around the stage and made her vocal entrances. In addition, Friend has had Wagner experience at Bayreuth and previously at ENO working with Goodall.



I was unexpectedly sitting in the front row (stage left) a few seats from the end of the row because the first three rows of seats had been removed to accommodate a slightly larger orchestra, though not a full string complement (about 20 short according to a friend in the orchestra). However, His Majesty's Theatre is a 1200 seat hall, with warm acoustics that were clear where I was sitting, and were also very good where I sat in the balcony on the Wednesday night and then towards the rear of stalls under the balcony level on the second Saturday night.

The orchestral sound was satisfyingly rich, although it didn't have the full rich silkiness of tone and playing that I've heard in Bayreuth and even with the San Francisco opera orchestra. However, I can say that, for my tastes, Friend brought an urgency and clear sense of line and movement to his conducting that made this performance more exciting and sensual than the safer, more opulent approach in San Francisco. The brass were satisfyingly accurate (apart from one slightly cracked note in the offstage hunting horns at the start of Act II in the opening night) and the woodwinds particularly eloquent in their yearning and despair. The oboist for the Shepherd's lament at the start of Act III drew moving pathos and desolation from his heart.

I thought how much like a little story is the music for the oboe here - giving us a sense of both Tristan's personal despair, but also the sense of loss and anguish we all feel at times in contemplating life. Tristan sings of "die alte Weisse", the old song, but it really is a song without words. Words are both inadequate to convey the mix of emotions and understanding that Tristan is experiencing, and are likely to distract us from sharing the experience by setting up arguments about whether a particular word is the right one to describe the experience or because a word means different things to different people. Wagner's point, as I understand it, is to circumvent intellectual games by a direct appeal to the heart through music. It is also, I think, part of the reason that much of the text of Tristan is written in very short phrases and concrete language - to limit the engagement of the intellect in working out the "meaning" at the expense of the experience. The other reason, particularly in Act II, is, I think, to imitate the dynamics of the sexual encounter - breathlessness and having other things on one's mind.

Now to the singing. As I have written elsewhere, I like Susan Bullock's voice, but, unlike the concert version of *Götterdämmerung* in Perth, or even the Toronto Ring, in this Tristan she has greater scope to act and move around the stage. Those of us who can remember Marilyn Richardson in the role, when she premiered this Armfield production, will also remember, gratefully, how she breathed life and movement into a role that can seem very static. Remember her kittenish leaps around the stage and rolling around the garden with a rather wooden William Johns, or even Horst Hoffman? Well, Bullock picked this up effortlessly and added her own touches to remind us that Isolde is a "young gal".

Allan Woodrow was suitably reserved and distant for most of Act I and loosened up a little under the influence of the love potion, but he was not as relaxed as Bullock in the lovemaking in the garden. Woodrow did, however,

make up for it by an electrifying death scene in Act III. I have not seen anyone emote quite so intensely in this role since Siegfried Jerusalem sang his last Tristan in Bayreuth. In fact, Woodrow voice reminded me also of Jerusalem's in Act III in Bayreuth - a bit ragged around the edges and having difficulty in maintaining accurate pitch and reaching the higher notes cleanly, but I was happy to overlook the sound for the intensity of the performance.

Bernadette Cullen was, as always, reliable and enjoyable to hear and a joy to watch as she responded to Bullock's mercurial changes of mood. Cullen was clearly enjoying the scope for movement and interaction that Armfield's production encourages and so drew me deeper into the world of these deeply passionate people.

David Wakeham as Kurnewal actually looked much more like a romantic picture of Tristan than the stockier Woodrow. In fact, in Act one I mistook him for Tristan until he started to sing the "wrong" lines!! And he sang well and also took advantage of Armfield's direction for more physical contact with Tristan. Watching him wash Tristan's brow, hands and feet was as moving as it was in the 1990 premiere. This time, it seemed to demonstrate very clearly and elegantly not just the care of one friend for another, but also one of Wagner's major concerns - the role of compassion in making bearable the anguish of life, especially when heightened by inextinguishable, unsatisfiable desire.

King Marke was, like Wakeham, perfectly cast. Physically, Harry Peeters is tall and regal in bearing, distinguished in looks and rich and resonant in voice. I remembered him from his Gunther in the Perth 2003 *Götterdämmerung*. In a sense, it was also pleasing to me to have a Dutch connection in the performances since the Dutch were the early discoverers of Western Australia - as anyone who has seen the Mills *Batavia* will recall - and I grew up with Dutch families as neighbours and friends in Perth.

The minor roles were nicely sung with Barry Ryan as Melot, James Clayton as the Helmsman, and Charles Mellor as the Shepherd and Sailor. In particular, Mellor, a very young looking tenor, has a lovely clear focussed voice that, I hope for Perth's sake, as a Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts graduate, has a long and successful career.

The review in *The West Australian*, by Stephen Bevis, generally made similar assessments of the singers and conductor as I have, also singling out Woodrow's acting. Of the conductor, Bevis effused in a rather forced simile: "Throughout the evening. Friend, who is steeped in the Wagnerian tradition, shaped to the demands of the score like Rhine wine to a goblet" (November 6, 2006, p. 6 Arts). He also seconded my general pleasure with the sound of the orchestra by writing: "It is not a slight on the singers, most of whom sang at stellar level, to say that the stars of this production...were the musicians of the WASO. I have seldom experienced playing at such a level of focussed commitment".

Would it be too much to wonder if the high standard of Wagner playing is, in part, a result of the orchestras of Australia responding to the achievements of their colleagues in each of the recent performances of Wagner operas, perhaps dating from



Stuart Challender's passionate direction of the SSO in the premiere of this production of *Tristan und Isolde* in 1990? We certainly have had some highly impressive orchestral performances.

### "Emotionally lacking despite high artistic values"

Sandra Bowdler writing for [www.theoperacritic.com](http://www.theoperacritic.com) under the above heading came to similar conclusions about the orchestra: "The West Australian Orchestra more than rose to the occasion, playing with beautifully shaped textures under Friend; the tempi were somewhat on the slow side, but never sluggish and always supporting the dramatic and emotional contours of the unfolding tragedy."

Bowdler noted that the "supporting roles were well filled in terms of both singing and drama." Bowdler considered, of Bullock that, "While generally accurate, her voice has a tendency to spread under pressure, producing a rather

wide vibrato in the higher notes with a rather squally or shrill effect, which often detracted from the beauty of the vocal line." And of Woodrow: his "tenor is somewhat less than heroic, without much ring, and a tendency to miss the correct pitch which seemed to accelerate throughout the evening. More problematic was his seeming lack of dramatic commitment; his expression barely changed at the moments of greatest passion. There was no obvious chemistry between the lovers." As you will see from my comments above, I thought there was plenty of "chemistry" and Woodrow redeemed himself for the patchy singing with passionate dying. In summary, Bowdler said: "The Wagner loving public was in many ways well served with a performance with high artistic values in terms of both stagecraft and music. *Tristan und Isolde* is however a great, if not the great, operatic love story, and in this sense this performance suffered a large hole in its centre."

## Who Was Who In *The Ring* -

### Peter Bassett

Ever since the first performance of *Das Rheingold* in Munich in 1869, the characters of the *Ring* have become such familiar figures in the Wagnerian canon that it is surprising to find that Wagner originally had other names in mind for his gods and goddesses, Nibelungs, Rhinedaughters, heroes, giants and the rest.

Some of the early names did not last long. The giants Windfahrer and Reiffrost, for instance, quickly became Fasolt and Fafner. However, the chief god was called Wodan, rather than Wotan, throughout the entire musical composition of *Das Rheingold*.

The three Rhine-daughters were at first called 'Mermaids with swans' wings' (*Meerfrauen mit Schwänenflügeln*), for they were originally created for the riverbank scene with Siegfried. Siegfried's reference to them as 'waterfowl' in *Götterdämmerung* is a relic of this. In mythology, Swan-maidens were idealized Valkyries, who often fell in love with mortal heroes and could be trapped on earth if caught without their plumage. The ripples from this legend reached Tchaikovsky's *Swan Lake* (1877), with its hapless Prince Siegfried and beguiling Swan-maidens.

Another early label for the Rhinedaughters was 'Prophetic sisters', which explains their function in *Götterdämmerung* (so different from that in *Rheingold*) of foretelling Siegfried's death and informing Brünnhilde of the true nature of events. Initially, Wagner did not give them individual names at all and they were simply numbered: First, Second and Third, like the Norns. His earliest names for them were Bronnlinde, Flosshilde and Wellgunde, then Woghilde, Wellgunde and Flosslinde, until he settled on the familiar Woglinde, Wellgunde and Flosshilde (*Woge* 'billow', *Welle* 'wave', *Flosse* 'fin').

The three Norns were originally called 'Women of fate' (*Schicksalsfrauen*). Mime, at first, was called Reigin. For a long time, Erda was known only as the Wala. She is, in one sense, Wagner's own creation, since there is no such earth-goddess in the northern myths. Despite her name (the Old High German word for 'earth') Erda's origins are in Greek mythology.

Some changes during drafting and composition were, like Wodan/Wotan, matters of spelling. Loke became Loge, Sigemund and Sigelind became Siegmund and Sieglinde, Brünhild, Brünhild or Brünhilde became Brünnhilde, Gudrun or Gudrune became Gutrune, Frigga or Frikka became Fricka, Freija became Freia, Fro became Froh, and Donnar became Donner.

### ...and What Was What

Some of Wagner's original names for places and objects also come as a surprise. The Cave of Envy (*Neidhöhle*) in which the dragon Fafner dwells, began as the Heath of Envy (*Gnitatheide* or *Neidheide*). The Gibichung Hall was Gibich's fortress (*Gibichenburg*), and the Tarnhelm was a Tarncap (*Tarnkappe*). The famous sword *Nothung* was originally called *Balmung* an old German word meaning 'destruction' and found in the *Nibelungenlied*. '*Balmung! Balmung! Neidliches Schwert!*' Doesn't have quite the same ring to it, does it? [Peter Bassett – This article appeared originally in the Valhalla newsletter of 2004 in preparation for the 2004 Adelaide Ring.]



# Some Observations On **Lohengrin** - Peter Bassett

## A marriage that could never be

If the Grail is *in* the world but not *of* the world, then so too is its servant, the Swan Knight Lohengrin. Elsa needs him to defend her honour but, in return, he seeks a love that is perfect trust. Their marriage prospects are doomed from the start because, to put it starkly, Lohengrin is of the spirit and Elsa of the flesh. It is not Elsa's frailty that is the issue - her curiosity is entirely reasonable - rather, it is the impossibility of reconciling the irreconcilable that lies at the heart of this beautiful and poignant opera.

Marriage - Wagner knew - often foundered on the hopelessness of trying to reconcile the irreconcilable. Liszt understood this (he was the work's first champion) as did the young Ludwig of Bavaria, whose Wagnerian infatuations began with a performance of *Lohengrin*. Indeed Ludwig's last-minute abandonment of his marriage to the Duchess Sophie (who, fatally, signed her letters 'Elsa') seems the first of many examples of Ludwig's life imitating Wagner's art.

## The convenient legend of the 'Swan Knight'

The legends of the Swan Knight were well known in the 12th century and their roots go back even further. The incentive for many of the stories seems to have been the need to ascribe a supernatural origin to a ruling house. A mysterious stranger arrives among a people, becomes their ruler and the ancestor of the reigning house, and then disappears again. What a helpful legend this must have been for noblemen whose lineage was subject to doubt or innuendo? Lohengrin doesn't father a line in any literal sense but he does restore Gottfried to human form and declare him to be the new ruler of Brabant, which is effectively the same thing.

## The forbidden question

The general idea of the forbidden question can be traced to antiquity, but we find a more particular explanation in Wolfram's *Parzival*. At one point, Parzival's half brother, the Muslim Feirefiz, decides to be baptised - not out of religious conviction but so that he can marry a beautiful Christian woman. When Feirefiz is baptised he is then able to see the Grail which hitherto had been invisible to him. On the Grail (which is a sacred stone in Wolfram's account) appears the text:

Any Templar appointed by God's hand to be master over a foreign folk must forbid the asking of his name or race and help them to their rights. But if the question is asked of him, they shall no longer have his help.

Feirefiz, like Lohengrin, does indeed go off to be 'master over a foreign folk' - in his case to India. So, behind the forbidden question in the opera is the Grail's own injunction to all who serve it. Lohengrin simply has no choice.

## Ortrud's paganism and connotations of cannibalism.

Ortrud worships the old gods: Wotan, Freia and the rest. She steadies Friedrich's nerve by telling him that the

mysterious knight will be forced to disclose his name and race, and then his power will be at an end. She explains that anyone who owes his strength to magic would be vulnerable should he be deprived of even the smallest part of his body. If, during the combat, Friedrich had cut off a finger - even a finger joint - then the stranger would have been powerless.

The idea of neutralising a person's powers by cutting off a piece of his body seems an odd thing for Wagner to introduce into the opera. Where does that come from? In one of the poetic continuations of Wolfram's *Parzival*, called *Der jüngere Titurel*, Loherangrin (as his name is spelt) marries a noble woman who is told by one of her maids that she can secure her husband's constancy by cutting off a morsel of his flesh and eating it. She cannot bring herself to do this, so her parents undertake to do it for her.

## No happy ending

Some of Wagner's contemporaries thought his treatment of Elsa too cruel and tried to persuade him to give the work a happier ending. For a while he hesitated and at one point, even agreed. Then he realised that no other ending could possibly be considered if the drama was to remain true to itself, and so he left it intact. Undoubtedly, this was the right decision.

Perhaps Elsa should have noted more carefully Lohengrin's remark to the swan when he first arrived on the banks of the Scheldt: "Glide back over the wide water to the place from which you brought me; return to where alone our happiness lies!" Then his departing words would not have come as such a shock: "Farewell, my sweetest wife! I shall antagonize the Grail if I remain longer. Farewell, farewell!"

## More Than A Little Sex at the Opera

That's the catchy headline for a review by Marc Porter Zasada of the current production of *Tannhäuser*: "it's endless, unsatiated sex with the goddess Venus in her Venusberg - a place populated with topless women and thonged men graphically demonstrating all major forms of human coupling under dim red lights". Zasada felt "Peter Seiffert makes a superb hero...eagerly blends his warm tone with the rest of the cast. He's matched by mezzo Lioba Braun as a worldly-wise and middle-aged...Baritone Martin Gantner strikes the perfect tone as the prudish but sympathetic Wolfram" and "... Petra Maria Schnitzer, known worldwide for her Elizabeth...brought the necessary counterpoint to all that unspent testosterone..[with]..a quiet emotional range and pinpoint control". Zasada also praised conductor, "James Conlon's delicate touch with the baton. The tone glows, it hovers, it withdraws - and even with a Wagnerian score open on his podium and all that "action" onstage, he never clubs the listener with Romantic bombast".





## ***Richard and Adolph*** – by South African Supreme Court Judge, Christopher Nicholson

The Jerusalem Post of 11 February 2007 carries a review by Erika Snyder of a new book, *Richard and Adolph*, by a South African Supreme Court judge, Christopher Nicholson, that traces Wagner's influence on Hitler (to be published by the Israeli-based Gefen Publishing).

Snyder quotes Nicholson as saying: "One sentence that Wagner wrote shocked me deeply. Wagner wrote that one day the German people would not shrink from their sacred duty to find a 'great solution to the Jewish problem.' From there, I wanted to know how much Hitler was driven by Wagner and his sentiments". Snyder reports that Nicholson, who has a deep love for Wagner's music, spent 15 years researching Wagner and Hitler's connection to the composer, his music and his political ideas. He also studied Wagner's operas in depth to understand and expose the anti-Semitism within these works. Additionally, he traveled to and from Germany, attending Wagner festivals in Bavaria to complete the extensive background research necessary to build the argument that Wagner not only helped to provoke the Holocaust, but believed that ultimately it would happen.

In the comments that Snyder quotes from Nicholson in her review there is, however, no evidence that confirms the argument that "Wagner not only helped to provoke the Holocaust, but believed that ultimately it would happen". Instead, there are the familiar points that Hitler liked Wagner's music and appreciated Wagner's anti-Semitic views. "Adolf Hitler became the fervent disciple and fan of Wagner," said Nicholson. "He read everything that Wagner wrote. He even believed he was the spiritual son of Wagner. Hitler's life mission was to carry out what Wagner suggested and hoped for: finding a final solution for the Jews."

One will need to read the book to ascertain whether Nicholson is able to establish a direct connection between what Wagner thought might be the "great solution to the Jewish problem" and what Hitler finally constructed as the "final solution". It would be of interest to see if Nicholson has anything new to add on the subject of the anti-Semitic content of the artistic works compared with the existing studies by Rose, Weiner and Weil.

Snyder reports Nicholson as saying, I take it of Kundry in *Parsifal*, that "'One of the characters is the female version of The Wandering Jew,' he explained, noting that she eventually dies symbolizing Wagner's hope for the eventual demise of the Jews." I personally have not come across this interesting example before. One could wonder that, as, in her previous incarnations as Gundryggia and Herodias, she also represented those characters, so, in her death, is also represented the desire for the death of all those Icelanders and Norsemen? I am indebted to a very useful website,

<http://www.faqs.org/faqs/music/wagner/general-faq/section-32.html> for the following information: "Gundryggia most likely was invented by Wagner. It is a play on the name of Gunn, one of the favourite Valkyries of Odin (=Wotan). The connection between Herodias and Gunn is that, in different versions of the same folk tradition, they ride with the Wild Hunt. In Germanic folk legend Herodias became identified with Frau Holda, who was variously equated to the goddesses Diana or Venus. The identification with Diana was recalled by Heine in his 'Atta Troll'". The point of this digression is to sound a note of warning about taking too literally or simply descriptions or characterisations that poets insert into their works. One could also note Kundry's own desire to die – is this because of her "guilt" as someone who insulted Christ, or is it, because of Wagner's interest in eastern religions because of her desire for the end of the cycle of Samsara (reincarnation)? One should also note that Kundry's death only occurs after her baptism by Parsifal leading, one assumes to the forgiveness of all her sins – in all her lives?? Very often in complex works of art, as in the case of Wagner's creation of the character of Kundry, there are multiple layers of reference each of which colours the other layers and creates a dense poetic interplay that almost never can be reduced to such assertions as: The death of Kundry, as a Jew, represents Wagner's symbolic destruction of the Jewish people. If we were to take Nicholson's point seriously, then, by implication any people's associated with Kundry in any of her incarnations would be in danger.

Snyder reports another quote from Nicholson,; "It is necessary for people to know how much Hitler was influenced by Wagner," he said. "That way, they can make informed decisions about attending his operas and listening to his music. In the end, whether Israeli orchestras perform Wagner or whether individuals listen to him is a personal choice. But, certainly, public funds should not be used for putting on Wagner operas." It seems to me that this argument is certainly back to front – blaming Wagner for all that Hitler did – in deference or homage to Wagner or not and then dumping all that asserted responsibility onto the music. One hopes that Nicholson has demonstrated very clearly that Hitler took specific ideas from Wagner and then implemented those ideas, without changing them, to be able to assert that Wagner was responsible, even indirectly, for the Holocaust. It is one thing to attribute blame to Hitler for misappropriating the works of a major western artist; it is another thing to assert that Wagner was instrumental in assisting Hitler formulate policies that resulted in the Holocaust.

The Editor would be happy to receive a review of the book for publication in the Newsletter. You can read the full review at <http://www.jpost.com/servlet/Satellite?cid=1170359834652&pagename=JPost%2FJPArticle%2FShowFull>. [Editor]



# The **Raven's** Reporting

- Compiled by Camron Dyer

**There is a regularly updated comprehensive list on the Society's Website <http://www.wagner-nsw.org.au> that takes the list to 2013 – the bicentenary of Wagner's birth!**

## **Metropolitan Opera's new production of The Ring Cycle**

Some of the cast members for the Metropolitan Opera's new production of The Ring Cycle (due for 2010-11) have been announced. Already known is the Director, Robert Lepage, but now it has been announced that Deborah Voigt will sing Brünnhilde, Bryn Terfel will sing Wotan and Ben Heppner will sing Siegfried. The Otto Schenk Ring production will see have its Schwannengesang in 2008.

## **Possibly the Schwannengesang of the Schenk Ring Cycle at the Metropolitan Opera?**

Mr Simon O'Neill (the Parsifal in the Wellington production of the music-drama) will be Siegmund at the Met (after understudying Placido Domingo in the role since 2004) with Adrienne Piezconka as Sieglinde, Olga Sergeeva/Lisa Gasteen alternating as Brünnhilde and Mikhail Petrenko (Hunding) in Die Walküre under Lorin Maazel, and they will have the same roles at the Covent Garden Ring. The production will be conducted by Maestro Lorin Maazel. These performances will mark Maazel's return to the Metropolitan Opera for the first time in nearly 45 years.

O'Neill is also cast as Siegmund with Placido Domingo in the new production by the Royal Opera Covent Garden of the Ring Cycle in October 2007. He is the first New Zealander since Sir Donald McIntyre to appear in Die Walküre at both the Met and Covent Garden. Judging by the picture of O'Neill in his Siegmund costume, he is almost as striking on stage as Siegfried Jerusalem – you can see a press release at [www.scoop.co.nz/stories/CU0702/S00317.htm](http://www.scoop.co.nz/stories/CU0702/S00317.htm).

## **The Ring Cycle at the Salzburg Easter Festival (late March/early April 2007)**

A coproduction with the Festival d'Art Lyrique d'Aix-en-Provence under the musical direction of Sir Simon Rattle with the Berliner Philharmoniker, Rundfunkchor Berlin, with direction and stage design by Stéphane Braunschweig and costumes Thibault Van Craenenbroeck. The cast: *Wotan* Sir Willard White, *Alberich* Dale Duesing, *Mime* Burkhard Ulrich., *Fricka* Lilli Paasikivi, *Siegmund* Robert Gambill, *Hunding* Mikhail Petrenko, *Sieglinde* Eva-Maria Westbroek, *Brünnhilde* Eva Johansson, *Siegfried* Ben Heppner, *Mime* Burkhard Ulrich, *Der Wanderer* Evgeny Nikitin, *Alberich* Dale Duesing, *Fafner* Alfred Reiter, *Erda* Anna Larsson, *Brünnhilde* Katarina Dalayman, *Gunther* Gerd Grochowski, *Hagen* Mikhail Petrenko, *Gutrune* Mireille Delunsch and *Waltraute* Anne Sofie von Otter.

## **Bangkok *Walküre* in July 2007**

As a follow up to the article in the June 2006 (No. 104) Newsletter about the performance of *Das Rheingold* in Bangkok, Peter Bassett, who provided a review of the production, has advised us that he is putting together a group for the Bangkok Walküre in July 2007 and thought that this might be of interest to Society members. You can find more information on Peter's website: [www.peterbassett.com.au](http://www.peterbassett.com.au) or If the idea of a four-day/three-night tour to Bangkok (25 – 28 July) for *Die Walküre* appeals, contact Vicki Mitchell at Renaissance Tours on 1300 727 095 or email her at [vickimitchell@renaissancetours.com.au](mailto:vickimitchell@renaissancetours.com.au). The Editor would be pleased to receive reviews of the production from anyone who attends!



# Annual Membership Renewal for 2007

1. Please provide your name, address and membership number if your Newsletter address label does not appear on the back of this page

Name	.....
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2. Please renew my/our membership from 1 January to 31 December 2007 on the following basis (please tick one)

<input type="checkbox"/>	Single member \$50 (single pensioner member \$30)	\$ .....
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3. I/We wish to donate the following amount to the Society.  
(Donations of \$2 or more are tax-deductible, and receipts will be issued. All donations are acknowledged in our Newsletter\*.)

\$ .....

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**The Wagner Society in NSW Inc** and post it to:

**The Treasurer  
The Wagner Society in NSW Inc  
GPO Box 4574  
Sydney NSW 2001**

\$ .....

5. Signatures

..... Signature	..... Signature
...../...../200 .....	.....
Date renewed	Name in BLOCK LETTERS
	Name in BLOCK LETTERS

\*Your donations, and money left over from membership subscriptions after the Society has paid for its operating costs, including the cost of the Newsletter and website, are used to meet the Society's aims, for example by sponsoring performances of Wagner's works, individual singers, and the Bayreuth Scholar.



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(most website addresses used in this Newsletter will be on the Wagner Society's website in the relevant article)

**Address for Sunday Functions  
Goethe Institut  
90 Ocean Street Woollahra (corner of Jersey Road)**